

RELIGIOSITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: MYSTICISM, ATHEISM OR INDIFFERENCE

RELIGIOSIDADE NO SÉCULO XXI: MISTICISMO, ATEÍSMO OU INDIFERENÇA

LA RELIGIOSIDAD EN EL SIGLO XXI: MISTICISMO, ATEÍSMO O INDEFERENCIA

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ABSTRACT: In this paper we will talk about the religious perception problem among the lay community and the religious indifference, as well as we will question what the church's role is in keeping faith and its renewal and how deep is relativism in our community. Based on previous studies sustained by specialized literature, we will develop a field work (inquiry) that will confirm the tendencies described in the theoretical part. We will find that in our community there's not a religious indifference but an accommodated Catholicism in which people only do and accept what's pleasant and easy in religion, refusing or just resisting to the hard parts, namely the religious practices.

KEYWORDS: Religiosity. Atheism. Catholic church. Religion supermarket. New religious movements.

RESUMO: *No presente artigo propomo-nos abordar a problemática das percepções de religiosidade na comunidade leiga e a indiferença religiosa, bem como questionar qual o papel da Igreja na renovação ou manutenção da fé visando compreender qual a profundidade do relativismo religioso na comunidade. Partindo de estudos prévios e fundamentados com bibliografia da especialidade, seguiremos para um estudo de campo realizado através de inquérito, visando confirmar as tendências descritas na literatura publicada. Conclui-se que a existência de um indiferentismo religioso na comunidade não se confirma no estudo de campo, mas sim de um catolicismo acomodado e apenas de fachada, que adota aquilo que lhe convém e rejeita aquilo que é difícil, desagradável ou trabalhoso, nomeadamente o cumprimento de certos preceitos religiosos.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Religiosidade. Ateísmo. Igreja católica. Supermercado de religiões. Novos movimentos religiosos.*

RESUMEN: *En este artículo nos proponemos trabajar la problemática de la percepción de religiosidad en la comunidad de legos y la indiferencia religiosa, tal como cuestionar ¿ qué importancia tiene la Iglesia en la renovación o en la manutención de la fe y cuán profundo es el relativismo religioso en la comunidad. Basándonos en estudios previos y fundamentados con bibliografía de expertos haremos un estudio práctico (encuesta) de que confirmará las tendencias descritas en la literatura ya publicada. Se concluirá que no hay un indiferentismo religioso en la comunidad, sino un catolicismo resignado y de apariencia que acepta*

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solamente lo que conviene e rechaza lo difícil, desagradable o trabajoso, como sea el cumplimiento de deberes religiosos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Religiosidad. Ateísmo. Iglesia católica. Supermercado de religiones. Nuevos movimientos religiosos.

Introduction

In the present article we propose to approach the problematic of the perceptions of religiosity in the lay community. Is it a synonym of being spiritual or is it something more concrete, formal and developed?

In previous readings and studies we have verified that contemporary society has been presenting a change in its religiosity and spirituality, much due to the "Supermarket of Religions" that is offered to it and that allows it to create a religion to suit its needs. At the same time, there seems to be a growing relativism and a blind acceptance of spiritual proposals more focused on the immediate and on sensations than on a solid and rigorous project of eternity, added to a notion that all proposals are valid and of equal value. At the same time, we realize that militant atheism is in decline as well, gradually giving way to a no less fierce, but paradoxically, in appearance, milder indifferentism.

All this seems to be combined with the excessive valuation of the "I", with the egocentrism and the growing individualism that characterizes our time, overvaluing the body, exalting having (instead of being), fed by a *media* that exploits these aspects to exhaustion. Not to mention the deformed concept of freedom of expression that social networks have brought, in which everyone has their own opinion: always valid, formed, unquestionable, and, basically, insensitive to the perceptions of others and without making any concession to them.

These aspects are clearly reflected in individual spirituality and religiosity, which seeks the best of all worlds, creating a religion to suit each one, accepting and rejecting truths and precepts at will, in an incomplete, deformed, disordered and confused spirituality, laden with values and rituals that are alien to each other, mixing pagan values with Christian rites, in an amalgam of post-modern thinking with untouchable dogmas chosen for convenience, made compatible on a case-by-case basis and only making sense to oneself.

We will try, therefore, to answer several questions that plague us, namely, we will try to listen to what the laity understands by being religious; question what they understand by faith; question what role the Church has for each one in the renewal or maintenance of faith; to verify if individual spirituality has become an *à la carte* spirituality in which each one

accepts to believe in what suits him/her, rejecting what does not serve him/her; to perceive the depth of religious relativism in the community; to understand if a true atheism or only -a negligent (and no less dangerous) indifference is present in the community.

Theoretical framework

We started this article based on two works by two authors who work on the theme of religiosity, religious malaise and secularization: Juan Martín Velasco² and António Teixeira Fernandes. Also, and to give a global perspective of religious practice in Portugal, we will rely on data - unfortunately already two years old - from the *European Social Survey* that shows the difficulties of the Church in Portugal but does not deny the religious and Catholic matrix of the country.

In fact, Portugal is still strongly marked by the Catholic Church, present in this territory even before the nationality, confusing its history with the history of the Church in Portugal and back and forth - it is not possible to write one without talking about the other. Its presence may even explain the values that inspired Portugal to be the first country in the world to abolish slavery and one of the first to abolish the death penalty. Thus, being Catholic in Portugal has already begun to be, for a significant fringe of the population, something simply cultural, even if it is still important in their identity and that even among Catholics fervor is beginning to fade.

Regarding the secularization theme, the reflection of Martín Velasco seems unavoidable for the theoretical foundation of our study. According to this author, despite all the criticisms and philosophical predictions that preceded contemporary times, religion has not disappeared. On the contrary, in his opinion, religion currently shows an extraordinary vitality to the point of speaking of a "time of religious effervescence". However, in Western societies there is a loss of influence of religious institutions and a move away from the practice of believers. That is, there is an unformed religion, averse to institutions and formalism (MARTÍN VELASCO, 1998, p. 15-18).

In the same sense, secularization, for Teixeira Fernandes, presents itself, paradoxically, as a decline of the sacred, but also as its return, assuming, however, a new form, now configured as a certain religious individualism. This author argues that, nowadays, we are facing a religious subjectivity, in the search for meaning, in which society no longer offers universally accepted visions of the world and forces individuals to search for meanings

² For all references see the end of this article.

that give meaning to existence, which he understands to be at the origin of the current cultural pluralism. In this way, it can be stated that current life presents a plural character, leading people to confront a diversity of choices (FERNANDES, 2001, p. 57-60).

Religious discourse today, for its part, predominantly reflects a certain despondency, giving voice to an awareness of the difficulties it is going through, and even the feeling of rowing against the current. The most evident regression is that of institutionalized religion, with the retreat of religious practice, the erosion of faith, the deviation of behavior in relation to the Morals taught by the Church, and the loss of credibility of religious Institutions as well as their "representatives" (MARTÍN VELASCO, 1998, p. 18).

Religion thus ends up losing its identification, becoming a -permanent object of questioning. Man -is living through a time in which he is forced to compose and recompose his belief system, facing the dilemma of continuing to obey the collective standards provided by the various confessions or seeing religion become a kind of free market. There are thus, at the same time, several degrees of religious integration, that is, from total identification, to weak identification, or even total lack of identification (FERNANDES, 2001, p. 60-65).

We live, therefore, a situation of great weakness of beliefs. We are facing a weakening of faith and an increase in unbelief that should lead us to reflect on some questions, namely: What does this increase in unbelief mean? What is the relationship with religious malaise and what are the prospects for the future? (MARTÍN VELASCO, 1998, p. 81-83).

Teixeira Fernandes argues, based on his study, that men are the most affected by skepticism, agnosticism and indifference and that women are more believers. In his study, this author states that skepticism predominates between ages 15-24, that is, as age increases, more people believe in a God who saves, a belief that, according to his study, crosses sexes, ages and professional activities (FERNANDES, 2001, p. 86-90).

He deduces, on the other hand, from the answers given to his study regarding life after death, that the Church's doctrine suffers from the growing competition of spirituality currents, and that we are facing a trend towards the protestantization of Catholicism, in the sense of being one more among many religions in our country (FERNANDES, 2001, p. 92-97).

Secularization imposed, in this case, a socio-cultural impact that led from a situation in which religion dominated all sectors of personal and social life, to another independent reality: it originated a "lack of place" for religion in society. We must, therefore, recognize that the maturation of thought leads this rupture, between Christianity and Modernity, to be analyzed in historical context (MARTÍN VELASCO, 1998, p. 21-23).

On the other hand, it can be said that secularization is felt more acutely the greater the central place occupied by the sacred in a given society. This secularization, as Velasco speculates, is a matter of bitterness, rebellion or religious indifference? Whatever the conclusion, the author's thought is that there are victims of secularization, and among these are all those Christian elements that are most difficult to integrate into modern consciousness, such as: the historicity of revelation, the message of the cross, and even the existence of the Judgment.

In this sense, the representation of God in today's society is inscribed in -a universe of human representations, in which the human dimension is measured by what man desires and the divine dimension is measured by the encounter with transcendent divinity (FERNANDES, 2001, p. 98).

In today's society there is a feeling of disconnection between religion and life that, in conjunction with individualism, generates a propensity to seek a religiosity that is tailored to each individual (MARTÍN VELASCO, 1998, p. 90).

The Catholic Church still seems to have ceased to be a preponderant institution in daily life, but it continues to play an important role in social normativity. Still, Fernandes argues that religious normativity still presents a very direct relationship with the degree of confessional identity, in which, the priests are the main builders of the identity of the faithful and this identity is built in the relationship with the other - integration in a set and a genuine identification, a real feeling of belonging (FERNANDES, 2001, p. 106-120).

The issue of religious indifference

Indifferentism is the result of several social transformations, occurring almost without the subjects being aware of their distance from religion. It is a process that is often initiated by the abandonment of some religious practices, or because they apparently no longer make sense, or because living conditions make them difficult. Thus, unlike atheism, there is no violent refusal or conscious tearing away, but rather it is a practical matter caused in large part by cultural and social evolution. Martín Velasco argues that the number of indifferent people will continue to grow, and may even become the most important group in the religious panorama (MARTÍN VELASCO, 1998, p. 83-89).

After years of close contact with Christianity, religion, and particularly Catholicism, appears to the indifferent and the non-practicing as something that was a routine practice, forced by socio-familial pressures, and, after this experience, they understand that Christianity

has not satisfied them, whether because of the repetition of the same words, the lack of meaning of signs and gestures... Indifference is thus, in Martín Velasco's view, a resentment against Christianity, partly the result of an ineffective and even counterproductive evangelization, although the seriously indifferent do not deny the contribution of Christianity to social values, but to nothing else (MARTÍN VELASCO, 1998, p. 91).

Indifferentism is, nevertheless, a serious challenge for believers in that it is difficult to respond to, since it is a degree of estrangement from the Faith and not just unbelief. The main difficulty in finding an answer to this phenomenon lies in the fact that indifference undermines the foundations of dialogue and takes away the strength of believers' arguments, emptying words of meaning and making communication impossible. It is in this sense more difficult to debate with an indifferent person than with a non-believer. This is, therefore, by no means an easy process, and dialogue with indifferentism is frankly difficult. To this end, specific solutions must be found for each particular reality, always taking into account both the environment and the participants, always carrying out the dialogue with an attitude of encounter and not of arrogance or submission (MARTÍN VELASCO, 1998, p. 97-100).

The supermarket of religions and *self-service* spiritualities

Religion is, in fact, a multidimensional reality, in which people with religious socialization deficits reconstruct systems of representations appropriate to their diverse lifestyles, in a desire for a *self-service* spirituality in which each one chooses what they accept and rejects what does not suit them (FERNANDES, 2001, p. 86).

We live, therefore, in a moment of pluralization of values - polytheism of values - but one cannot honestly affirm that the very decrease of contact with the Church necessarily leads to generalized atheism, but it certainly contributes to the propagation of a diffuse religiosity (FERNANDES, 2001, p. 151-154).

The case study and analysis of the results

The present survey was used with the aim of understanding religious perceptions, the respondents' view on some aspects of the Church and contemporary religiosity, trying to understand what are the reasons for the crisis of the religious and what are the challenges both for believers and for the Church.

It is noteworthy that the survey was applied to random people, during the month of January 2021, delivered by hand, being filled out with complete freedom and respect for the respondents' confidentiality. After this application, the surveys were collected and the necessary analysis of them was carried out, which will be presented in detail below. Three male and four female respondents answered, the largest group being those over sixty-five years of age. If the first mirrors the national reality - there are more women than men - the second is not yet true, despite the aging trend in the country. There is an equal percentage in the other age groups, with no young adults (between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four) surveyed.

The majority of respondents say they are religious (71%) and a considerable majority (71%) define themselves as Catholic. The remaining respondents claim not to have any religion, and there were no respondents from other religions. When asked about the main reasons for defining themselves as religious or not, the respondents are divided between the justification of doing good, sharing, praying, believing in God and Doctrine. It is worth noting the importance given by some respondents to the attitude of selfreflection and the notion that they are religious because they have spirituality (10 and 7%), which may already be perceived as a deviation towards *new age* tendencies, which will be confirmed in the following questions.

In relation to the reasons for not being a religious person, the most important are the notion that religion is something outdated and disagreement with religions in the traditional mold (7% each). Interestingly, the notion that God is not needed or that man does not need God had very little adherence (about 3%) from which we begin to glimpse that the respondents who assume themselves as non-religious are just disillusioned or indifferent, agnostics possibly, but not atheists. Equally surprising in this study is the fact that not a single person mentioned the option of claiming to be religious by imposition (by tradition, "this is how I was taught by my parents"...), and the fact that only 6% of the respondents pointed to going to mass as a factor in defining themselves as religious people. As we will see, the frequency of the Eucharist is one of the aspects in crisis. Also, and on a positive note, 10% of the respondents defend that religion is a support, a strength in their lives.

In the same sense we wanted to know, then, what makes someone define themselves as Catholic. For 23% of the respondents it is to fulfill religious duties, and for 17% it is a set of traditions and rites, in a rather reductive vision. For the same 17%, being Catholic is to commit oneself to the good of mankind and to believe in a God who saves, and only for 11% it means participating in the community of believers, again perceiving the decline of the

parish community and the importance of praying together. Almost 6% of respondents say that to be Catholic is to give up their freedom and carry out mere routines.

Therefore, we ask ourselves what is the meaning of being Catholic nowadays. Despite the previous answers, for the majority of respondents it still makes sense (about 89%), divided between considering that it makes sense for oneself (44.4%) and for society (the same percentage), again noting that the importance of religion is pushed to society (anonymous, the others) as well as the blame for the lack of religiosity, as we will see in the next point. For about 11%, however, being Catholic no longer makes sense today.

On the issue of religious indifference, most respondents (57%) believe that it has a tendency to increase, but the remaining 43% believe that this will not happen, possibly believing that it can only be maintained, or, very optimistically, believing that society will return to a more intense religiosity.

The reasons given are absolutely unanimous among all the respondents, blaming the hierarchy of the Church and the priests, the Church itself because it is inadequate (we will see below that this question is not as serious as it might seem), and also society, which they accuse of lacking ethical values. Thus, we can deduce -that, for the respondents, the problem of religious indifference is within the religious -institution itself, although they also point the finger at society, to whom, they say in question seven, religion is beneficial.

When asked how they understand God, most respondents (almost 1/3 of the respondents) say they have a personal relationship with God, but the answers with a taste for new spiritualities - God is a spirit or a force, is something that is inside of me... both with more than 23% response - and almost 8% identify God with the Good, the human good, as the best that Man has. In those who say they don't believe, we confirm here what we had previously deduced: there are no respondents saying that God doesn't exist, they just say they don't believe or don't know what to believe, not denying Him.

In the same sense we wanted to ask the respondents who they understood Christ to be, covertly asking the same question He asked His disciples. The majority (41%) of the respondents recognize Him as God made Man, perhaps recalling the Doctrine or catechesis. The second largest group (1/4 of the respondents) understands Him as a wise man, and 17% recognize Him as one of the prophets. The confusion is therefore already great, but the Christian notion still remains in most of the answers. On the other hand, 8% of those polled consider Christ to be a human invention or an invention of the Church itself, an answer that makes us wonder how far unbelief goes: do we deny the Christ of the Church, or the historical Jesus as well?

Exploring sensitive questions that would allow us to glimpse how far the influence of other religions and *new age* religious movements goes, we directly questioned what the respondents understood there to be after death. Here we can see a great confusion between reincarnation as advocated by other religions and spiritualities - namely Hinduism and Buddhism, and *new age* movements inspired by Eastern religions - and the resurrection of the flesh, a new life in the Kingdom, since some respondents marked the option "reincarnation" simultaneously with the option "a new life". Even so, half of the respondents believe that after death there will come a new life, and ¼ of them believe that there is nothing after death, that death is the end of everything. Further exploration of this aspect of the influence of spiritual currents and other religions on the respondents' thinking reveals that reincarnation is an already rooted belief, soon to be followed by certain superstitions and horoscopes. Even though it was purposely said that these were practices parallel to the established religion, the respondents assume they believe (at least) in spirits, witchcraft, seers, and thaumaturgists (11% each), and no one left this question blank.

When asked about the moment or moments when respondents feel closer to God, they are divided between the most difficult moments and the moments when they are accompanied by friends and family, more than in the simple happy moments of life (17.5% versus 23.5%). Work is also a moment of closeness to God, as are the moments when they are alone. Introspection thus seems to have a considerable importance (11%) for listening to God according to the respondents, who we could speculate feel His presence more in difficult moments (possibly when they are more "attached" to religion) and when they are surrounded by significant people. Extrapolating a little further, we can associate greater closeness to God with happy moments (50% of responses, adding the happy moments with the presence of family and friends), against 23.5% of respondents who associate greater closeness to God with difficult moments. Still, 11% do not usually even think about this issue.

Moving on to even more sensitive topics, the degree of agreement of those targeted was questioned about the (perceived) Doctrine of the Church. We say perceived because certainly many of the respondents will not have a very deep or extensive knowledge of these matters, admittedly dense. Thus, the respondents are completely divided, with the same percentage saying they agree absolutely, mostly or only partly (about 28.5%), with the remaining 14.5% saying they totally disagree. This is therefore not a conclusive answer, so the next question aimed at what matters of Church doctrine the respondents dislike most.

Again the respondents are divided between the questions regarding the indissolubility of marriage and the issue of abortion, with 27 and 22%, respectively, of the respondents

disagreeing with the Church's position, followed by the value given to the Sunday Eucharist (18%). The duty of confession is also questioned, and the same 13% assume they disagree with the Church's position on euthanasia.

It is also worth noting the disagreement - residual, however - on the issues of celibacy and male exclusivity in access to the ordained priesthood, which however is not reflected in the other question where male exclusivity is addressed - no response was noted here. We also asked where respondents think the Church should avoid interfering, and again the issue of sexuality is the choice of most respondents (1/3), soon followed by issues concerning marriage/married life (about 1/4). For the remaining 40%, business and social life should not be matters in which the Church should interfere, this being understood as a possible reaction to the Holy Father's criticism of unbridled capitalism.

In what concerns the perception of exigency or rigor of the Church's Doctrine, for almost 43% of the respondents it seems too rigorous and only for 28.5% adequately rigorous, the same value as those who consider it somewhat rigorous. This shows that a good part of the respondents would like a greater openness and flexibility in the doctrine, certainly meeting their disagreements regarding the sensitive topics we have previously analyzed.

Thus, in the same sense, 57% of those polled even believe that the vision of the Church is somewhat out of step with the world today, and 14% say it is very out of step, with only 28.5% believing it is adequate for the times in which we live. There is thus a

desire for change and the respondents even suggest in which areas the changes should take place.

We also wanted to know, in addition to the feeling of belonging to a particular religion, what the respondents feel about the closeness of the Church to their people, and only for 28.5% of the respondents is the Church very close. For the same percentage, the Church is distant from the people, and the largest group (42.8%) considers that the Church is only sometimes close to the people.

In this way, we wanted to know the degree of belonging of the respondents to their parish community, and even ignoring the Sunday Eucharist, as we have already seen, 42.8% of the respondents say they have a relatively strong or even very strong degree of belonging (14%). However, for 14% this degree of belonging is weak or even very weak (28.5%).

Taking into consideration the question about the responsibility for religious indifference and the degree of belonging to the parish community, we tried to find out what the respondents think about parish priests in general. For one-fifth of the respondents they appear authoritarian, detached from the real world, and materialistic (making up 60% of the

answers, 20% each option), and for another 40% they are understanding (7%) and committed (20%), being close to the people for 13% of the respondents. Respondents do not consider parish priests to be either cheerful or uncaring, which is truly worrisome considering the other results.

We also wanted to know the respondents' opinion about the importance of religion in the world. For 42% of the respondents it is still very important and for 14% it is even extremely important. 28.5%, however, consider it not very important, with no one indicating that it is not important at all. This option is confirmed in the next question where no one mentions that religion is not important at all.

Regarding the question about the various world religions, respondents are divided between saying that there is only one true religion and those who maintain that religions are all the same (42.8% in both cases). The question remains whether the answer that all religions are equal is only ecumenical - considering that they all aim at salvation and goodness, only following different paths - or a negative and relativistic vision in which it is understood that they "all lead to the same thing" and that it makes no difference whether they practice one or the other. We would like to believe that it will be a mixture of both...

We then went on to a diagnosis, asking about the challenges faced by those who today want to be Catholic and lead a life accordingly. Once again we confirm the tendency of the respondents (42.8%) to point the finger at the other, and once more at the Church - sometimes because it is inadequate, sometimes because of the scandals (in) which involve it, although for 28.5% the problem is intrinsic - lack of time, disagreement with Doctrine. The new religious proposals and indifference are only considered by 14% of those polled, the same percentage as those who find no challenge in being and living as a Catholic.

We wanted to end the survey by asking, in the end, what is the greatest challenge facing the Catholic Church today. For 30% of the respondents the answer is the need for modernization, and for the same percentage of respondents the answer is the need to be an example. For 15%, the great challenge is not to lose the faithful, and for another 15%, the focus should be on attracting, evangelizing and converting (we would say, re-evangelizing and re-converting). 7% believe that the great challenge is simply to keep the faith, which seems to us a somewhat pessimistic and discouraging answer.

Final considerations

Finally, the results we obtained, which can be compared with the authors cited in the theoretical framework, have the limitation of the age of the works cited (1998 and 2001) - we assume the problem, which we did not foresee at the time of the initial research. Still, in certain cases the results obtained reflect the evolution and growth of indifference, relativism, and the distancing of believers from the Church that had already been mentioned by the authors.

The respondents, in general, present a religious fluidity, not offending them to believe in Christ and at the same time resort to spiritism, witchcraft or believe in psychics and horoscopes. Nor do they generally consider that, in order to be part of the parish community, they must regularly fulfill the duty to participate in the Sunday Eucharist or even to go to confession. This is in line with the statistics presented by the *European Social Survey*, which as we mentioned earlier concluded that only 40% of Catholics attended Sunday Eucharist on a weekly basis (EUROPEAN SOCIAL SURVEY, n/a).

They are also able to reconcile their disagreement with sensitive matters of the Church, namely their position regarding the inviolability of life - both in its beginning and its end - and the indissolubility of Marriage, with their claim to be Catholics and part of the community. Thus, one selects what one believes in, what one accepts and what one rejects without it seeming to affect their identification as Catholics, as if one could live the richness of the Gospel without the community, only turned inward, isolated, living a very personal and individual faith. This is not a surprise, since it is in line with what Teixeira Fernandes had already mentioned (FERNANDES, 2001, p. 86), we can see the individualism (FERNANDES, 2001, p. 92-97), this religious fluidity, the *self-service* spirituality, and the ability to compose and recompose the belief system at each moment (FERNANDES, 2001, p. 60-61).

Still, something has remained of the teachings, respondents point out that Christ is God made Man and most claim to believe in the Doctrine. Paradoxically, respondents say they fulfill their religious duties and this is a factor in defining themselves as Catholic, but, as seen, regular Mass attendance is rejected as particularly important. At the same time, the image they put across of priests is unflattering, with some respondents attributing to them a good deal of the responsibility for the growth in indifference and as a factor in the main challenges presented to the Church. This is a novelty when compared to what Teixeira Fernandes found in 2001, and it may be the case that the sample we used is exceptional or, on

the contrary, there has been an involution in the image of ordained ministers (FERNANDES, 2001, p. 116-120).

The question regarding the growth of indifference seems inconclusive to us, as the respondents attribute equal blame (1/3) to priests and the Church hierarchy as to the lack of ethical values and inadequacy of the Church, without clearly pointing to a main responsible party. On this last point, it is inferred that this inadequacy is relative to the times in which we live, by conjugation with the issues directly related to this matter, considering it outdated and in need of modernization.

The Church itself is referred to as close to the people, which is in line with what Teixeira Fernandes was already advocating, but at the same time rigorous in its precepts and out of touch with the world, recommending it to modernize and become an example, attributing to the scandals in which it is involved the greatest difficulty in presenting itself as Catholic (FERNANDES, 2001, p. 130-134).

In relation to rigor, it is in line with the social thinking of our days, everyone wants few rules, little control, little State, so we do not consider this element worrying. As for the modernization requested, this one is problematic, because we have to- ask ourselves: what kind of change is being sought? By wanting to change, by wanting to reform, won't we destroy what we have, irretrievably? Do we not run the risk of becoming too similar to other religious proposals with the loss of our twice millennial identity?

Perhaps because this is a small sample we do not find signs of the religious effervescence mentioned by Martín Velasco (MARTIN VELASCO, 1998, p. 15-18), but a Catholicism that functions outside the walls of the Church, averse to formalism, as argued by this author. Neither age (over 65) nor gender (female) fashions make the results less worrisome. It is certainly in women that one finds the survey closest to Catholic orthodoxy, but also one of the most hostile.

However, the absence of completely religion-averse or militant atheist respondents is welcomed. No respondent says that God does not exist, only that they do not believe, and that God is not needed (in this case only one answer). There is, however, a negative image of the Church equally evident in the answer claiming that Christ is an invention of man or of the Church itself. Again, we wonder if the answer only means that Christ is a

construct, a narrative, or even that the historical Jesus himself is an invention.

It is, however, to be welcomed that the majority (56%) of respondents believe that religion is at least quite important in today's world, and that still about 42% consider that there is only one true religion with the same percentage of respondents saying that they are all the

same - we would interpret here, perhaps with some boldness - in a certain spirit of ecumenical openness, considering that there are many paths to God. God who is present, according to the respondents, especially in the moments spent with family and friends, in the moments of joy, but also in the most difficult moments, like a Father embracing His children in suffering, nurturing -and protecting them. God, with whom a good number of respondents claim to have a personal relationship, but whom many already identify with a force, an energy, something they carry within themselves? Likewise, it is to be welcomed that still 89% of the respondents believe that it makes sense to be Catholic today, even if this is only important for society, for some. In any case, for the majority of respondents being Catholic still makes sense, not only for themselves but also for society.

Thus, we conclude that, rather than an indifferentism, which according to the literature and to our perception seemed to be the greatest threat to contemporary religiosity, we are facing a Catholicism that is accommodated and only a façade. If, on the one hand, it gives us hope because, as we said, dialogue is not at all easy with indifferent people, due to their amorphous and "whatever" character, on the other hand, it is worrisome that such a large percentage of assumed Catholics believe they are Catholics without one of the main sacraments, without fulfilling one of the first commandments of the Church, living in a religious individualism, experiencing the religion of the apostolate, of the Gospel, turned inward, to a private, individualistic worship. There is, we reaffirm, hope. The sheep are far from their shepherd, distrustful of the fold, longing for new pastures. The adoption of new strategies, the path that has been taken to remove the elements that are less beneficial to the People of God, the openness that has been made in this last pontificate, the close and loving image of the Holy Father, can certainly bring new things and bring the lost sheep closer together, making them willingly accept once again the *gentle yoke of the Good Shepherd*.

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